John Armstrong

Ryan Barkley, a junior at Charlotte Catholic has been called by his teachers and peers as a young entrepreneur. Because of his lawn mowing business and his success in many online contests, he is confident about his future.

Barkley started mowing lawns just to make a couple of bucks here and there. “I always liked to mow my neighbor’s lawns for the tax-free quick cash,” said Barkley

Over time, he realized how much money he was making from mowing the lawns with his push mower alone and he decided to save enough money to purchase a riding mower to improve efficiency and increase his revenue. “I bought one at Lowes for $400 and I found out I can sell it soon for $1000.”

He made flyers on his computer to advertise his business, which he put in his neighbor’s mailboxes. Last year, Barkley set up a schedule where he mowed six yards a week.

“I would make 25 dollars per lawn, and my aim is to get ten yards a week , so that would mean I would make 250 dollars a week, $1,000 a month over the course of the cutting season which typically lasts five to six months,” Barkley said,

In addition to his lawn mowing business, Barkley also participates in online contests. He first learned of these from a newspaper in the school library he saw while he was studying for exams.

“It was an ad for a contest by Keffer Hyundai. You had to make a video advertising their cars, post it onto their Facebook page, and if you got the most people to like your post, you would win!” Barkley said.

This was the first online contest he entered; it was also the first one he won. “The first contest, I won $1000, I was on the radio, and I also got an iPad.”

He searched for other contests by looking at the Facebook pages of different industries and companies that would offer them. Over the past year, he has won approximately $2500 from these contests. He has entered at least ten.

Barkley tends to enter the online Facebook contests of local businesses to avoid scams. He entered a contest for McAlister’s, winning a $25 gift card to their deli for getting the most people to like a picture of his dog that he posted on their wall. He also entered another contest, where he had to write a story about a Father’s Day experience at a restaurant. He wrote about a steakhouse called The Palm, and won, and he received a $150 gift certificate to the restaurant.

His most recent contest, however, did not go well. It was another contest by Keffer Hyundai, where one had to post to their wall why they deserved to win the prize, and get the most people to like the post. The prize was for a $1000 diamond pendant, which he planned to sell. However, because he was not 18, he was disqualified.

“I had asked them continually if there were any age restrictions, and never got an answer. I got the most likes though,” Barkley said.

Much of his support for these contests comes from messaging his Facebook friends and asking them to like the post of the contest. Sometime he would even ask permission from his friends to use their Facebook accounts and send a message to all their friends to like his post on the page.

“It’s easy and fun because I get money and there is not much competition.” Barkley said

With all this money he is making, he has to have a way of managing it. He set up a system, where he keeps any cash prizes he gets, but deposits any checks. He then uses the cash to buy things from Goodwill, and sell them on e-bay immediately. “I will buy about 20, four dollar t-shirts from Goodwill, and then sell each of them on e-bay for $16, pocketing $12, which means I make $240 from selling them all.”

Barkley shows the qualities of a real entrepreneur, and he acknowledges. He said “Making money doesn’t have to be a hassle. It’s like a game, and having money just sit and not accumulate is pointless. Why shouldn’t I use it and make it grow?”

One day he cashed a $500 check, but asked for it all in ones, and seeing what $500 looked like, he had the desire to spend it. He doesn’t keep all this money all to himself though. He’ll donate some to local charities where he volunteers at.

Barkley’s plans for the future include starting his own business, either a product or service; but for now he will stick to his small scale system of making money through Facebook contests, Goodwill, mowing lawns, and e-bay.